

EMPOWERING THE HUMAN RESOURCES AND THE ROLE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

As the world is invaded by technological inventions and wonders, life becoming more fast and crazy, yet there can be no doubt that the critical factor for the development of a nation or a state is its human resource. The productivity of a nation is influenced by the number of its skilled population. When we look into the problem of underdevelopment from human resource perspective we are bound to take a look at the educational scenario. In India, the higher education scenario has been very sickly, due to the pro profit policies, lack of infrastructure, entry of private players, etc. The growth of distance education phenomenon in India has no doubt brought a ray of hope. The present paper aims to look into the role of distance education in Assam and the potential it carries in building a huge wealth of human resources.

Keywords: Distance education, human resource development, globalization, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Development (HRD) cannot be defined in obsolete terms, as it is ever evolving. Earlier it was termed as "training" and then it became widely used as "training and development" and then finally to HRD. In all these phases of development, HRD has maintained a distinct feature and which is the expansion of knowledge and skill for personal as well as organizational development. HRD implies the development of those attributes in man that can lead him to a life without any wants. The developments that can make him stand at par with the others and hold his head high. It can be summed as "the total knowledge, skills, creative abilities, talents and aptitudes of an organization's work force, as well as the values and attitudes of an individual involved" (Arya and Tandon, 1998). HRD focuses on the development of an individual's skill and prepare him for productive usage. The term has been used more in the policy matters and hence has become a cliché. The five year plan of India has also mentioned the importance of HRD on national economy and growth. Academic studies in the field of HRD have emphasized the potential of higher education for the growth in economy as well as reduction of poverty. The focus of every nation and worldwide organizations has been on the development of HRD. It is the important factor that determines the nation's development.

GLOBALIZATION AND HRD

With the growing of economic liberalization leading to globalization, the world has turned itself in to a global hub, where productivity matters. Productivity depends on material and human capital. Human capital in return depends on education and training. "Education holds the key to meet the ever rising but the changing demand for employment from the dynamic rapid growth of the economy." (Sengupta, 2010) As per the Human Development Report of 2011, India ranks 119 in HDI. From the year 2005 to 2010, India has not much progress in HDI ranking (In 2005 India ranked 120 and in 2010 it was 119). Thus the situation isn't very satisfactory. Human Development Index is defined for every nation on the basis of the three basic factors that shape the lives of man - education, health and income. Human resource is an important source which can lead to a country development. This human resource are modified and shaped by the mode of education. Education is such a process through which it can provide innumerable number of ways and to explore the areas of individual growth which in turn provides growth of the country. But due to lack of sufficient resources in education sector the population has gone down without skill. The condition of higher education in Assam is pathetic and primary education is doing well but mere improvement of such education will do nothing for the human resource and its development.

It is important to know that many states believe natural resources is much more important so that a country can utilize it fully and improve its condition and left the most important part that is human resource. And this negligence has shown the fall down of its growth because human resource is important for the proper utilization of the natural resources. There are some regions who are rich in natural resources we can give example of Assam and Punjab, but they are not doing well instead of abandoned of natural resources. Or else we can give example of country that is poor in natural resources yet ranked in the developed nations- they are Japan and Israel. They utilized their human resources properly which helped them to utilize their limited resources and build their nation's economy.

ASSAM SCENARIO

Assam has potential human resource and abundant resources, like oil and natural gas ,coal, rubber, timber, tea and other minerals, and abundant of water resources which can be utilized properly for the state's development. Presently the large number of masses of Assam, the population of which is nearly 3.11 crore according to the 2011 census needs skill education and higher education, the need of which is very well trying to fulfill by the universities including the open universities.

Table: 1
Population and Literacy Rate of Assam for the year 2011

Description	2011	2001
Approximate Population	3.11 Cr.	2.67 Cr.
Population Growth	16.93%	18.85%
Literacy	73.18%	63.25%
Male Literate	78.81%	75.23%
Female Literates	67.27%	51.85%

Source: <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/assam.html>

The above table exemplifies that fact that there has been a rise in the population and so also the rise for the need of making education possible for every youth in the state.

The economy of Assam is basically based on agriculture, however with the liberalization reforms new avenues of employment for the youths have come up. Thus the economic indicators give a dismal picture.

"The HDI Report 2004 has noted that the gap between Assam and the National average in terms of economic indicators has been widening since independence". The pursuit of progress cannot be observed unless there is skilled labour and trained manpower in the state. The state has five universities including one agricultural University, 3 medical colleges, five engineering colleges including one Institute of national importance, IIT.

But the gross enrollment ratio in higher education is very less. Assam government is seen to show interest in elementary education more, whether it is Sarva Shiksha Abhijan or mid-day meal scheme and less emphasis on higher education, which is not good for the country. Both should be given importance. Higher Education holds the key to reduction of poverty whether it is economic or social.

**Table: 2
Enrolment in Higher Education**

COURSE	Total Enrolment			SC			ST		
	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
Ph.D/ D.sc/ D.phil	339	440	779	21	15	36	26	31	57
M.A.	3372	4215	7587	351	235	586	283	451	734
M.Sc	1337	2691	4028	198	109	307	108	213	321
M.Com	229	880	1109	92	33	125	18	77	95
B.A. With major and without major	58221	87351	145572	8566	5231	13797	5421	8903	14324
B.Com with and without major	2392	14316	16708	1423	417	1840	590	1715	2305
BE	830	2168	2998	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
B.ED,B.T.	957	1431	2388	195	80	275	135	180	315
L.B./L.L.M.	1584	5593	7177	415	200	615	165	361	526
M.B.B.S	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam 2010.

However, the human capital of the state has been wasted as the table below will reveal the unemployment situation.

Table: 3
Number of person unemployed per 1000 persons

NSS Round		Rural		Urban	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6
59 th Round Jan. 03-Dec.03	Assam	431	803	454	927
	India	453	689	459	854
60 th Round Jan.04-June 04	Assam	473	914	472	921
	India	473	772	469	879
61 st Round July04-June 05	Assam	449	791	449	891
	India	454	673	451	834
62 nd Round July 05-June 06	Assam	474	865	442	915
	India	463	776	466	879

Source: Employment Policy of Assam, 2011.

The problem of unemployment is the biggest fall down of the human resources, in spite of huge natural resources the economy of the state has going down is because some of the resources were not utilized properly. The table above highlights the unemployment situation in the state with 45% unemployed and the figure for women is lesser. The huge gap in the unemployment level is due to the lack of access to the higher education.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN HRD

The emergence of Distance Education in the scenario is a testimony to the fact that higher education in the conventional mode has been in troubled waters. Some of the problems in Higher Education (formal mode) are given below:

- Expensive/ Elite dominated
- No diversification of courses:
- No scope for development of individual skill/vocational training
- Privatization of higher education
- Lack of wide accessibility
- Inequity

Education is a key factor to human growth whether it is cultural, social and economic. Distance Education is an approach which supplements the higher education, for those who are away from the higher education till date. It is in a way an educational sub-system to cover large portion of people who have potential yet not provided opportunity. The characteristics of Distance Education is beneficial to common people and to employed personal because to pursue a course from such institutes one need not have to physically present in a classroom set up. The system is more open to students, to study according to their convenience, here student teacher relationship is also more open and flexible and left scope to consult, discuss and offer solution and suggestions.

The student may be geographically isolated but integrated to the course which one is pursuing. Technology has got its immense role in education today and distance education has embraced it from the very beginning.

In Indian history, the emergence of distance education can be traced in 1962 when the University of Delhi established the School of Correspondence Course and Continuing Education. Due to the good response, many states of India introduced correspondence courses through the establishment of Directorates of Distance Education or Institutes. This paved the way for the establishment of the National Open University in 1985, known worldwide as Indira Gandhi National Open University. But the first Open University was the Andhra Pradesh Open University in 1982, which later became the Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University in 1992.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM AND ITS POTENTIALITY

There are five types of Distance Education providing Institutes in Assam-National Open University (IGNOU), three Dual Mode University (Directorate of Distance Education (DDE), Dibrugarh University/Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University/Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University), a State Open University (KKHSOU), foreign Universities (Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai/Tamil Nadu Open University, etc.) and private Institutions (ICFAI/Sikkim Manipal University, etc).

The Assam government has shown its interest towards the open and distance educational scenario, to cover large number of human resources. They have also given importance to both skill education and professional education. KKHSOU is a first in this kind of university in the State and also for the entire northeast. The efforts of this university can be seen through different vocational and professional courses. They are keen in providing certificate courses to those who are barely crossed the school level education yet are capable of some certificate course where they can utilize their capabilities. It has also got professional courses like MBA, MCA, MMC, MSW etc. The basis objective of the university is to cover all those students who have left their education at the early stages of their life and to generate employment opportunities and promote economic growth. In simple words it tends to increase the need of the human resource of the state.

Distance Education offers an opportunity for the people who wants to broaden ones knowledge no matter the person is retired or going to be retired from job or is the working force of the state.

This working population can utilize the distance mode in acquiring skill and needed education which in other way help in their promotion and opt for new job opportunities. There are also different degree diploma courses which are not very common to conventional education like labour studies. Another very benefit of open and distance learning is that it has flexibility in curriculum, which can be molded and shaped according to the need of the society.

Distance education has extensively used technology which is also noticed in Assam through IDOL (Gauhati University) and KKHSOU. They used online portal where student consult faculty members and get answer about their doubts.

Both the institute has one community radio where community can get enriched with different value topics including educational. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University has also got one social networking site ,where anybody come and join in any discussion which is sensitive towards the society which can also help to make aware of any topic of the society.

Therefore it is seen distance education has potential to provide adequate human resources to country as well states growth.

The education provided has to be set in a practical world. This implies that the education must be in sync with the market driven economy. The flexibility approach of the DE allows for the offering of courses that are practical and employment generating.

The DE Institutes in the state offers a wide variety of programmes that can enable the learner to be employed in a field of his/her choice.

It is not only enough to give practical education but also to involve the potential employers/agencies to collaborate with the Institutions for providing better exposure to the learners.

As a form of continuing education, DE enhances the chance so of gaining knowledge at one's own pace. Thus, human capital is not wasted, as it contribute to the production process for a longer period of time.

The DE system is easily adaptable to changes and hence proves itself as the viable option for quality learning and training. The use of ICT in DE has dramatically changed the higher education paradigm with new delivery methods coming in. The learners can now take the advantage of modern technologies for a quick grasp of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The change in economy and the demands of the market has shaped the world today. In this world, where success depends on the competitive level of the individual, the task for upgrading oneself with new skills and knowledge has become more than urgent.

Distance Education fills in the lacunae left by the conventional mode of higher education. It entails to bring the dream of higher education to all the sections of the people. The scope of De surpasses any other form of higher education.

Assam is one of the states with huge potentials but the lack of human resource has resulted in stagnancy of development of the region. Hence, De has a definite role to play in Assam.

The importance of HRD and specially the necessity for investing more on human capital has been rightly by the Chinese philosopher, Guanzi:

***"When planning for one year, there's nothing better than planting grain,
When planning for ten years, there's nothing better than planting trees,
When planning for a lifetime, there's nothing better than planting men"***

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